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AUTHOR Butler, Marylou; Waterman, Robert D.
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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the accreditation candidacy of New Mexico's Southwestern College (SC) and sees it as a transformational process for the institution. SC is a private, non-profit, special-purpose, graduate level institution in Santa Fe, New Mexico which offers masters programs in counseling and art therapy. The school achieved candidacy for accreditation in February, 1992, following an unsuccessful attempt in 1988-89. The accreditation process affected leadership of the institution through a shift from presidential to Board leadership after a long period of leadership by the founding president. The process made the organizational development more consistent with SC educational philosophy, mission, and purposes through examination of what was thought to be a participatory management style and discovery that a situational management was in place that was no longer suitable to the institution. The process changed the educational mission and programs through a reworking of the mission statement and educational philosophy as distinct statements, a phasing out of the Bachelors degree completion program, and reassessment of student recruitment efforts. Finally, the process changed the institutional relationship to accreditation so that SC now sees accreditation as integral to the fulfillment of its vision rather than as an external hurdle. Includes an appendix comparing approaches to accreditation, a 28-item bibliography, and 6 references. (JB)

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Marylou Butler
Southwestern College

Robert D. Waterman
Southwestern College

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Southwestern College

Robert D. Waterman
Southwestern College

Introduction

Southwestern College is a private, non-profit, special-purpose, graduate-level institution of higher education in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which offers M.A. programs in Counseling and Art Therapy. The College achieved candidacy for accreditation in February, 1992, following an unsuccessful attempt in 1988-89. The challenge of turning failure into success required us to make a number of shifts in our perceptions of accreditation. We intentionally approached the second candidacy process as an opportunity to transform the institution rather than merely as a task to be completed for external approval. We also came to view accreditation as integral to the mission of the institution rather than adversarial; to value the process as much as the end result; and to view NCA staff, consultant-evaluators and review committee members as colleagues rather than "gatekeepers".

In addition to making shifts in our mindset toward accreditation, it became clear that we would also want to utilize the transformational process on which the College's approach to education is based, for the self-study endeavor. Specifically, Southwestern College is guided by an approach to education that is rooted in American transcendentalism as represented by Ralph Waldo Emerson and in Progressive Education as represented by John Dewey. The philosophical perspectives fostered by Emerson and Dewey have led to an educational impetus increasingly referred to in the

literature as "transformational" or "transformative education" (Boyd and Meyers, 1988; Tierney, 1989). In terms of curriculum development, the transformational learning process is: 1) person-centered in that is draws out the resources within the person to foster effective participation in the world as a professional; 2) holistic in that it facilitates the development of all aspects of the person; 3) experiential in that it teaches principles through an interweaving of theory and application and promotes knowledge and character development in the student; 4) reflective in that it utilizes faculty who are "reflective practitioners" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985); that is, they must be active in applied settings, willing to share their experiences in the classroom and able to teach the reflective process to students (Doerre, 1989).

The second candidacy process enabled the College to transform itself in numerous ways, including shifts in our understanding of our fit within the academic community; articulation of our mission and purposes so that others understand us; and strengthening of the College's organizational structure and resources to promote long-term health for the institution.

Areas of Transformation

Four areas of transformation were evident during and following the College's successful candidacy attempt: 1) leadership of the institution, including a reframing of the relationship between the Board of Directors and the President; 2) organizational development, including changes in management structure and style, and a deepening commitment to long-range planning; 3) clarity of

the educational mission of the College, including decisions about degree programs, the student body we seek to attract, faculty to be recruited, and the ability of the library to provide access to materials; and 4) the College's relationship to the accreditation process.

1. Leadership of the institution: The shift from presidential to Board leadership of Southwestern College was one major area of internal transformation. It became evident that the institution needed to mature from the model of a founding president with considerable influence in decision-making in all areas of the life of the institution to one in which the Board of Directors assumes its role in the leadership of the institution by providing accountability for the Office of the President and has members who offer access to public resources and complement areas of inexperience within the organization. In building a Board of Directors that could oversee the institution, stimulate fiscal development and represent the public interest, members were added with experience in the areas of legal affairs, fundraising and development and program planning for underrepresented groups, e.g. Native Americans.

2. Organizational development: The candidacy process has challenged Southwestern College to transform the internal organizational structure and management style so that it is more consistent with our educational philosophy and mission and purposes. We reviewed what we thought was a participatory management style and discovered that we were really using

situational management and that the latter model was more appropriate for the size and nature of the institution.

Second, it became evident that the College's degree of reliance on tuition as the primary fiscal resource supplemented by contributions was unrealistic and that a different balance of contributions and tuition was called for to provide the fiscal, physical and human resources needed for the growth of the institution. We established a development office, hired a director of development and have committed human and fiscal support for fundraising and grant development.

Third, as a developing institution, we had been effective in meeting immediate challenges through personal sacrifice and crisis intervention. Implementing a more effective long-range planning process gave us an arena for gathering a diversity of viewpoints on what we could accomplish, the resources needed and strategies for achieving a particular goal. A permanent planning committee has given us a way to involve a larger group of individuals in determining the future of the College. This has altered a pattern of insularity for decision-making and future planning. We value the long-range planning process for both the stability of the College and for achieving full accreditation and use our plan for institutional development as a guide for internal accountability and future direction.

3. Educational mission and programs: When it was clear that the first visiting team could not understand our mission statement and educational philosophy and that the first review committee

thought we were claiming to have developed our own model of psychology, we went to work on rewriting our philosophy of education and statement of mission and purposes. Through the completion of a thorough literature review and the assistance of an educational consultant with considerable experience with the NCA accreditation process, we were able to distinguish our philosophy of education from our statement of mission and purposes. We also identified our approach to the teaching and learning process, i.e. transformational education, as one that has growing acceptance in the professional literature and is a way of applying psychological and educational theories in the learning process. We realigned with Emerson and Dewey as foundational theorists for our philosophy and mission. We could then write philosophy of education and mission and purposes statements that "define the basic character of the institution . . . and account for how the institution fits within the broader higher education community (NCA, 1992)."

The candidacy process led to certain decisions about degree programs offered by Southwestern College. The College began as an upper-division and graduate-level institution offering a B.A.-completion program in Applied Psychology for individuals with two years of undergraduate work completed elsewhere. Once we understood the NCA General Institutional Requirements related to undergraduate education and examined the fiscal realities of the small enrollment in our B.A.-completion program, as well as the confusion about degree requirements for our B.A.- and M.A.- level students that was reflected back to us by the visiting team, we

decided to focus on doing what we do best. That has meant phasing out the B.A.-completion program and concentrating on the graduate-level education of counselors and art therapists with a focus on the character development of the student in the first year and preparation to meet the standards of professional associations in Counseling and Art Therapy in the second year. We changed the way we related to the standards for training of these professional associations through discovering that, while we used these standards for curriculum development from the inception of our programs, we were not always consistent in actual practice. For example, we changed one degree program from Creative Expressive Therapy to Art Therapy so that our graduates' credentials could be perceived more clearly by the professional community. We also added coursework in specific areas so that our students would be prepared to meet changes in the demands made of them in various employment settings.

In examining the student body, we became more conscious of the kind of student we were attracting and developed ways to market and recruit students in order to foster the steady growth in enrollment that has occurred since the achievement of candidacy. We examined other institutions whose programs are aimed at the same kind of student, i.e. the adult learner. We became clearer about the aspect of higher education in which we are engaged, namely graduate-level, professional education for adult students who have a certain level of maturity and life experience.

In the area of faculty development, we have clarified the kind

of professional educator we select, i.e. "reflective practitioners, . . . with established reputations as clinicians and/or educators . . . with experience in applied settings, involvement in relevant professional associations . . . and willing to bring the benefit of their experience into the classroom (SC Catalog, 1992, p. 58)." We have continued to evaluate our commitment to defining faculty and administration as complementary activities by having several administrators engaged as core faculty. As the institution grows larger and more administrative demands arise, we will continue to seek a balance in the work assignments of those particular individuals. We have a plan for increasing certain core faculty positions to full-time during the candidacy period. The push from NCA for greater involvement by our faculty in academic governance and curriculum development has led to increased internal leadership by the faculty as a governing body.

The critique of the College's library during the first candidacy review led to a shift in emphasis from holdings to access. In the second review, we made a case for how we had strengthened access while <u>also</u> committing resources to holdings in the professional literature needed to support our applied programs. We have strengthened our commitment to the library with the appointment of a Library Director with considerable academic experience and a plan for the addition of library support staff during candidacy. The institution has become clearer about the central role of the library in successfully fulfilling its mission and purposes.

4. Relationship to accreditation: The College now sees accreditation as integral to the fulfillment of our vision rather than as an external hurdle. The candidacy process has strengthened our self-perception as an institution of higher education. Meetings with our NCA staff advisor and attendance at NCA Annual Meetings enabled us to clarify our relationship to our educational philosophy and mission and purposes. The experience with NCA has transformed our view of accreditation from an adversarial one to one in which we now assume that all persons engaged in the process have integrity, are sincere and truly care about the evaluative process in higher education. We see that it is our responsibility to engage with and respond to whatever viewpoint is offered as we head toward full accreditation. Less concerned with our uniqueness and specialness, we want to continue to clarify what we have to offer within the realm of higher education.

The challenge to Southwestern College in achieving candidacy for accreditation appears to be a microcosm for what higher education must address. Faced with the opportunity for transformation, the challenge becomes one of focusing institutional resources in a way that is efficient and flexible, yet responsive to the demands of diverse student bodies; preparing students for leadership in the world while maintaining character development as the core of education; and confronting diversity and difference in a way that is expansive rather than divisive. The key for us is to return to the roots of our philosophy of education and mission and purposes as the reference points from which to change.

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Marylou Butler is Academic Vice President, Self-study Coordinator and a core faculty member at Southwestern College, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Robert D. Waterman is President and a core faculty member at Southwestern College, Santa Fe, New Mexico.